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ABSTRACT

The study describes a college which has achieved financial comfort and stability. The focus is on how campus members learn about the institution's financial condition and their attitudes toward the institution's resource strategies. Special attention is given to the views of persons outside the top administrative circle. The college, which has been given the pseudonym of Continental College in this report, was one of eight institutions participating in a study of organizational and leadership dynamics and experiencing various degrees of resource stress. Interviews with up to 15 administrators, faculty, and trustees were conducted on each campus to elicit personal views of leadership and campus life. In regard to Continental College conflicting views emerged, with some interviewees reporting that the college is very organized, efficient, and task-centered while others felt that the task orientation is distancing and depersonalizing. Faculty appeared more attuned to contradictions than did administrators. Views are presented in terms of the following: stability as appearance and reality, "organization" as resource strategy, learning in bureaucracy (e.g., nature of information flows, different learning roles), experience as the "flip side" of structure, and evaluation. The case of Continental College raises three concerns: (1) that financial stability is not necessarily associated with faculty vitality; (2) that the organizational images of control and stability may shield stressful and disordered internal realities; and (3) that concerns about learning are separated all too frequently from concerns about leadership. Contains 34 references. (DB)

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The Critical Faculty:

Academic Leadership and the Quandary of Stability and Stress

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The Critical Faculty:
Academic Leadership and the Quandary of Stability and Stress

Studies of resource stress in higher education focus heavily on the causes of financial decline, strategic responses, and approaches to cutback management (Zammuto 1987). Although a number of writings also attend to the internal behaviors of leaders and other campus participants during financial "hard times" (Cameron, Kim, and Whetten 1987; Cyert 1980; Peterson 1984a, 1984b; Rubin 1977; Whetten 1984), only a few consider cognitive or affective dynamics (Chaffee 1984, Chaffee and Tierney 1988, Neumann 1989), including how leaders and other members of a college community (e.g., the faculty) learn about troublesome resource conditions, and how their learning affects their sense of well-being (Neumann 1989).

While the ambiguity that accompanies resource loss makes its study important from a cognitive and affective standpoint, a focus on resource difficulty suggests that there is little of comparable interest or concern in stable organizations. For the most part, researchers have neglected to give financial stability the kind of attention accorded to financial stress despite the fact that a significant number of higher education institutions are, in fact, stable (see Cameron, Kim, and Whetten 1987).

This tendency to overlook resource stability as a contextual organizational feature in its own right is potentially dangerous. First, the experience of change, such as resource stress, may radically alter patterns of organizational functioning (Birnbaum 1988), and in studying mostly institutions in altered states, we may mistakenly generalize to institutions that are stable. Second, in attending to the unique effects of resource-related changes, we may miss equally important effects of stasis. Organizational scholars have recently re-oriented their views of "change" to consider, not only its observable, behavioral form (e.g., Bennis, Benne, and Chin 1969; Downs and Mohr 1976; Lewin 1947; Munson and Pelz 1981; Zaltman and Duncan 1977), but also its cognitive and affective manifestation in the form of "learning" (e.g., Bartunek 1984, 1988; Ford and Baucus 1987; Isabella 1990). It may be just as important to supplement our current understanding of stasis, as the antithesis of change, by considering its subjective side, especially in colleges and among faculty, whose business it is to engender cognitive and personal development. Third, in focusing purely on institutions under resource stress, we may find it difficult, if not impossible, to untangle the unique effects of organizational and leadership practices from the unique effects of stress.

A case in point is the difficulty of isolating the unique effects of resource stress and organizational practices on faculty morale and institutional well-being. Institutions under financial strain are often depicted as lagging in faculty vitality, morale, and esprit (Clark and Lewis 1988). An extension of this view, frequently cited as conventional wisdom, is that the faculty of financially troubled institutions are

likely to be dispirited in comparison to the faculty of institutions in solid financial shape where morale is likely to be higher -- in sum, that "hard times" lead to poor faculty morale, and conversely, that "good times" lead to improved morale. What this view fails to consider is the importance of culture, leadership, and organizational practices as independent influences on the faculty's well-being. A balanced budget and plenty of black ink are no guarantee that a college has evolved a culture, organizational design, or leadership strategy that nurtures the good health of its non-financial aspects, including the faculty's morale and vitality.

My purpose, in this study, is to consider the inverse of what we have typically been concerned with in higher education. Rather than looking at an institution in financial trouble, I present the case of Continental College, an institution that has achieved enviable financial comfort and stability. Rather than focusing on how campus members deal with their financial condition, I focus on how they learn about it and how they feel about the resource strategy that frames their world. Rather than considering only the views and feelings of administrative leaders, I give special attention to the perceptions of persons outside the top administrative circle (especially the faculty), thereby assessing how the work of leaders is mirrored in the minds of "followers." In sum, this is not a study of what Continental College is and how it works; it is a study of what it looks and feels like to those who comprise it.

Probing Stability: The Case of Continental College

Continental College[1] is one of eight colleges and

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[1] In order to abide by promises of research confidentiality, I have disguised numerous features of institutional and personal identity. Continental College is a pseudonym, and although I refer to it as a "college," I use this term in the most generic sense and without reference to any Carnegie (institutional) type. The gender that I ascribe to individuals does not necessarily reflect a person's true gender. All position titles (e.g., president, trustee, department chair etc.) and all names of official groups (e.g., cabinet, faculty senate, etc.) are generic, reflecting their general use in the field rather than their specific name in this institution. In this study I refer frequently to the voice of the faculty which, in the data, is represented by a variety of individuals including formally selected faculty leaders (e.g., the head of the faculty senate or union), informal faculty leaders (e.g., respected individuals with no formal leadership responsibilities), academic administrators (persons heading academic departments or other academic units), and other campus observers. I made other

universities participating in a study of organizational and leadership dynamics and experiencing various degrees of resource stress[2]. The eight institutions share a prominent (but not necessarily exclusive) commitment to the teaching function, especially at the undergraduate level. Four of the institutions (two private and two public) were experiencing various degrees of resource stress during the 1986-7 academic year; the remaining four (two private and two public) reflected financial stability. Continental College falls in the latter set.[3]

During the 1986-7 academic year, and again in 1988-9, a researcher spent three days on each campus, including that of Continental College, interviewing up to fifteen persons, including administrators, faculty, and trustees, in sittings that ranged between one and three hours per person. The researcher used a structured interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions to elicit individuals' personal views of leadership and campus life. The intent was not so much to construct a consistent and verifiable picture of a singular, objective college reality, but to search interpretively for patterns of perceptual consistency and incongruence in what campus participants believe their reality to be. The study, then, is less a record of reality than of personal interpretation.[4]

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similar changes where the institutional name for a process, place, or object might reveal identity.

[2] Resource stress is defined as resource loss or instability that exceeds the limits deemed acceptable by formal institutional leaders. An institution's resource stress level was determined by analyzing administrators' financial assessments of their college's financial well-being and by examining HEGIS-IPEDS financial and enrollment data and institutional documents.

[3] The institutions participating in this study, including Continental College, were selected from a larger sample of 32 institutions of diverse type, size, structure, curriculum, and leadership orientation, participating in the Institutional Leadership Project, a national, longitudinal study of leadership in higher education; the eight institutions participating in the resource stress study reflect this diversity as well.

[4] The larger analysis of the eight institutions moves comparatively from case to case (Yin 1984). In constructing an interpretive image (or images) for each campus, I "revisit" each campus, conceptually, with every review of (or re-immersion in) the data. With each revisit, I re-record my "field notes," tightening or enlarging the narrative description, or "textualization" (Van Maanen 1988) of what I had heard on site, especially as patterns of similarity and difference become apparent. For Continental College, this involved six rewritings

Introduction: Stability as Appearance and Reality

Continental College leaves a visitor with the feeling that it is extremely stable, especially with regard to resources. In its public documents, the institution displays a steady and healthy enrollment, a sound inflow of grants and contracts, an extremely successful fundraising program, a long streak of balanced budgets, and minimal debt accumulation.

The findings of a coarse but objective financial assessment are consistent with this message that Continental projects to its publics. Over a recent six-year period, Continental's rate of inflation-adjusted revenue increases matched or exceeded the average growth rate for all American colleges and universities.[5] It is noteworthy that while the college's inflation-adjusted revenues grew substantially, its enrollment level remained relatively unchanged.

The college's resource stability is matched by its operating stability. One interviewee summed up the tone and meter of college life by saying that the campus runs "like a fine-tuned Swiss watch." Classes meet, faculty teach and strive for publications, department heads pore over program plans and class schedules, administrative processes run with only a few hitches, students of predictable type matriculate and graduate in relatively predictable numbers. Except for sporadic, short-run outbursts concerning the nature of a certain campus routine or tradition, the student newspaper features a smooth stream of official campus events.

In sum, Continental College is financially solid, and its leadership knows this and says it publicly. The campus also appears to run like clockwork, with small deviations quickly caught and just as quickly corrected.

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of the case in whole. In this way, I move iteratively from non-systematic (but thorough) recording of what I heard and saw, to more ordered and systematic description based on emerging patterns, and finally to analysis. The major limitation of this approach is its reliance on the perceptions, interpretations, and energies of a single researcher. The process resembles methods of qualitative analysis originally described by Schatzman and Strauss (1973).

[5] Comparisons were based on the "Higher Education Prices and Price Indexes" (Research Associates of Washington, 1988).

"Organization" as Resource Strategy: Making the Stability Happen

In describing how the college has achieved its current level of resource sufficiency and smoothness of operation, the administrators and trustees of Continental College evoke images of rational leadership and delegated responsibility, and they espouse a governing ethic of minimized conflict.

The president explains that it is his job, as Continental's chief leader, to envision what the college is to become and to direct its members toward that end -- first, by impressing his goals on them, and second, by providing them with what they need to achieve those goals, namely "the peace to do it, and the resources." At Continental, the concept of "peace" refers to the absence of conflict and disruption. In the words of one campus participant, "We don't have confrontations here, and we avoid it at all costs ... there is no room for argument." The president explains that after providing the "resources" and the "environment," he "delegates the rest," explaining that he "can't get involved in detail" and that "faculty do the work" of achieving goals.

Below the president, administrators explain that they are expected to work autonomously, minimizing distractions as much as possible in fulfilling their delegated responsibilities. However, to balance the autonomy that comes with delegation, top administrators claim final authority. In the words of the president, " ... My level is decisive. I'm not a rubber stamp." Administrators believe that this ethos of rationality pervades the organization. In the words of one top official, "What we don't have here that you see at other places is this -- the fiefdoms ... there is no political environment here."

In sum, from the perspective of its top administrative cadre, Continental College runs like a classic bureaucracy. But how does its cognitive side function? How do people in a bureaucratic structure learn about the outcomes of their college's resource strategy? How do they come to know about the state of their resources?

Learning in Bureaucracy: Roles, Opportunities, and Information

Learning, as defined here, refers to the process whereby individuals come to assume the common understanding of an organization's resource reality, regardless of whether they actively define it on their own or in the company of others, or whether they adopt, critically or without question, the definitions that others create. This section identifies the roles that the administrators, trustees, and faculty of Continental College typically play as they "learn" about their shared resource reality, and it assesses the opportunities that these actors have for sharing, enlarging, or refining their

learning through interaction with others. Finally, it examines the ease with which learning may occur, given the nature of information produced and its means of distribution.

Different Learning Roles. Years ago, an important, top-level administrator at Continental assumed, virtually single-handedly, the responsibility of setting out, in handbook form, the types of data that college members rely on to evaluate the institution's financial condition. Today the data handbook continues to serve as the institution's central reference guide, in that it contains various statistics and indicators of the college's financial health, updated regularly. It also serves as a "dictionary" of sorts that registers the type of data that campus members typically use to assess officially the state of the campus' financial health.

The administrator who originally developed the handbook still plays a prominent leadership role at Continental, and is known, throughout the campus, as the conceptual force behind the college's very effective budgeting system. In addition to his original defining role, he assumes, today, two other roles with regard to the college's resource condition: He regulates the campus' budgeting process by setting out its calendar, by initiating and directing the activities of individuals and groups involved in the process, and by bringing the process to closure when its "product" (the budget) is complete. He also gives voice to this product, proclaiming its "reality" to the campus community.

While the administrator who conceived of the data handbook stands out in this defining capacity, there are other administrators who have, over the years, adopted and internalized the conceptual core that the handbook represents. While these other administrators all share a combined receiving and using role, that role takes on two distinctly different forms. Some of these administrators, including several cabinet-level officers and academic administrators, use the handbook actively as the material of their thinking -- for example, using the statistical information to make decisions about how to staff, schedule, or develop their programs and classes.

Others (including the president) use the data to oversee college activities. The handbook keeps their "hands on" the internal workings of the institution as they attend mostly to their externally-directed work (e.g., fundraising, building outside support). Although these individuals are thought of as "passively involved" in internal campus affairs, it is assumed that they may intercede at any moment. They view the handbook as a "surrogate for their involvement" in internal college dynamics that would, otherwise, distract them from the external responsibilities to which they give their primary energy. The college's trustees are in exactly this same role, relying on the handbook (or selected portions or versions of it) to monitor institutional activity and to prompt their intercession when the signs warrant.

The faculty also are in an information receiving position, but their version of the role precludes "information use" in both the active and the passive sense that apply to Continental's administrators and trustees. In the words of campus participants, the faculty are "kept apprised" by administrators who "speak at" them, and they are "handed decisions" that are "not for consultation." The faculty may receive reports describing the state of institutional resources, but as targets of an institutional dissemination effort (rather than potential users of information), they rarely respond to the administrators who deliver them.

Opportunity to Interact. The extent to which faculty, as members of a discrete and distinct group, engage with each other differs dramatically from the communication and interaction patterns within the administrative and trustee groups. In comparison to administrators and trustees, the faculty, as a collectivity, gather far less frequently to exchange information and opinions, to voice their understandings of what is happening at the college, and to learn how others interpret and feel about what they see.

From the perspective of at least some faculty, institutional logistics simply do not support the opportunity for faculty to meet and learn what is on each other's minds. One interviewee explained, "There is no place here to bring faculty together. No psychological space -- no physical space." In the absence of a forum, the faculty are described as "retreating into their own bailiwicks" and "pulling their horns in out of frustration," and as a result, the sense of a campus-wide faculty leadership disappears. In the words of one interviewee, "Department chairs ... take care of their departments, but they are not campus leaders ... we don't have any strong [faculty] leaders here ... no power base."

In the view of the faculty, the absence of a faculty forum or a horizontal linking structure keeps them from becoming a collectivity.

The trustees and administrators interact, among themselves, in ways that differ sharply from those of the faculty. Within the administration, the cabinet meets as a whole irregularly and infrequently on an as-need basis, but despite the formal distance, cabinet members remain in contact with each other as a "group" via formal memoranda and reports. One administrator explained that in their roles as cabinet officers, administrators rarely mix with each other for informal or personal purposes. The "ideal relationship" between cabinet-level officers involves "merely greeting each other cordially" and avoiding "talk" that would be equated with "gassing" and "vapor." Thus, although the administrators, as members of the cabinet, do not exercise their opportunity to meet often, they have a formal, albeit restricted, structure to do so when necessary.

The top administrative group has carved out for itself

another type of opportunity to interact as colleagues with selected "others" -- one that is exercised more than it is talked about. At an informal level, the cabinet breaks into two subgroups, and in their roles as members of these subgroups, individuals interact more among themselves, both formally and informally, than they do in their roles as members of the larger, formal cabinet. For example, when a person thinks up a bright idea that needs testing or elaboration, she does not hesitate to call her subgroup together or to walk over to a colleague's office to chat informally about it. Also within their protective inner sub-circles, administrators feel free to vent doubts, concerns, anxieties, and frustrations that they do not show on the outside.

In sum, within their sub-groups, administrators exhibit qualitatively different brands of member interaction than they do in the larger, formal structure of the cabinet. Within each sub-group, there is less restriction on <u>what</u> is exchanged among members because there are relatively few formal restrictions on <u>how</u> the exchange may occur.

While the faculty describe themselves as "alienated," and while the administrators portray their "team" as fractured, the trustees present an image of comfortable and meaningful cohesion.

The trustees meet frequently among themselves and especially with the administration, but they have very little contact with the faculty. Although they meet occasionally with various cabinet officers, they see their primary contact to be the college president. The chair of the board of trustees sees the president often at regular board meetings, and more importantly in one-to-one informal sessions over the telephone or in person.

Although the frequency with which the president and trustees speak together appears important, what they say to each other, how they say it, and how they come to see and feel about each other may be more so. As part of his larger, self-defined fundraising duties, the president spends extended time "spelling out" to trustees and other external supporters exactly what Continental College stands for, how it works, and how it relates to their own lives. The president's fundraising philosophy reflects the belief that the cultivation of external financial support really means the cultivation of the <u>human sources</u> that provide it. What this means to the president, who defines himself as the institution's chief fundraiser, is that he must dedicate himself to shaping how supporters and potential supporters understand and feel about the institution. That is, he works persistently at keeping the institution foremost in their minds: "[The] public has to understand what Continental College is ... [they] <u>must</u> continue to reflect on this."

In this way, the president builds a close cognitive and emotional bond between himself, as representative of the college, and external supporters. This relationship differs dramatically from the relationship that he shapes with the faculty, which he defines in more instrumental terms and which he believes could

distract him from his primary external obligations.

The nature of information flows. Although the information contained in Continental's budgetary handbook is distributed routinely, administrators, trustees, and faculty differ in what and how much they get, and also in when and how they get it. As a result, these three sets of campus actors differ in what, when, and how they learn.

Within the college, faculty are at the narrowest end of the information funnel, while top administrators are at the widest, as they have access to the total handbook. According to one interviewee, "As you go up the chain of command, you get more and more reports and summaries." The trustees receive selected reports based on the handbook, although regularly and frequently.

The information that administrators, faculty, and trustees get also differs in its specificity and in the amount of interpretation that accompanies it. The faculty get a "short form" and "rough categories." Like the faculty, the trustees get a picture of "the larger and rough distribution." The difference between what trustees and faculty get has to do with the amount of interpretation that accompanies statistics, the personal or impersonal style through which the interpretation is delivered, and the extent to which the data are "custom fit" to meet the needs of one group as opposed to another -- or at least, the extent to which "receivers" perceive "senders" as genuinely concerned with their unique interests.

What do the numbers mean? Administrators explain that along with the data, "we give [the trustees] the principles [that underlie them] and we guide them." The "guidance" that administrators provide is delivered personally. The trustees, in turn, praise "the grand job" that administrators do of keeping "beautiful records ... like a business," and they explain how easy it is for them to see how revenues balance with expenses and how "the capital infrastructure" is being maintained.

The faculty, on the other hand, receive brief information which some say "is presented in such a way that all you need to do is to glance at it to know that things are better." Some faculty accept this message with few comments or questions, while others readily admit that they can learn little if all they see are "rough categories" and "small pieces," and if there are "no benchmarks" that would help make meaning out of what otherwise are "budgetary mysteries."

Moreover, the faculty receive most of their data through the institutional dissemination process composed of "normal vehicles -- newsletters, annual reports, ... reports on admissions outlooks, faculty senate minutes." Given the more personalized information that is directed to trustees, in comparison to the more impersonal information that they get, the faculty reach the conclusion that "the information is really prepared for the trustees" with the faculty getting only the "copy." In sum, while trustees are personally encouraged to engage with meaningful data, the faculty remain unengaged.

Experience as the "Flip Side" of Structure:
A Second Look at Organization and Learning

From the perspective of most administrators, Continental College functions like a classic bureaucracy. But individuals outside the top administrative circle, especially the faculty, have different views. What is smooth, rational, and functional at one level looks and feels quite different at another; what some organizational members view as a singular, objective reality, others experience in a subjectively different way. The differences are especially apparent in how the faculty view their "organization" and their "learning."

The faculty experiencing rationality. Although top administrators depict their reality as rational, structural, orderly, and predictable, faculty describe their experience, under the cover of formal organization, as more malleable:

> There is a lot of centralized decision making .... the ultimate decisions are strategic. But then we implement these -- but we also do different things with them .... there is flexibility down below.

For example, while administrators describe what they experience as an efficient budgeting process that always leads to a balanced budget and to a surplus that is allocated on the basis of articulated need, the faculty describe how the system, as it is set up, forces academic and faculty leaders to "learn to scheme" and to "compete," and how it forces mid-level academic leaders to "put more into those [budget requests] than any chapter [they] have ever written."

The theme of rationality as a harbor for political and emotional events not subject to rational understanding is echoed in other ways throughout the organization. While administrators subscribe to their own final authority over institutional events and resources ("I am responsible for everything"), persons at lower rungs explain how they carefully fashion their communication to nudge administrative attention in desired ways. While top administrators assert a theme of impersonality, individual responsibility, and minimal personal interaction, those who are officially below them speak of forming "networks" and friendships and holding informal advice-giving sessions. While top administrators speak with unwavering certainty about the official institutional philosophy, faculty speak with some hesitation about discrepancies between the college's historic identity and how they see it changing.

In sum, while administrators think of their organization in a single rational vein, the faculty (and especially academic leaders) think about it, and act within it, in more complex ways.

The faculty experiencing delegation. The principle of delegation that reserves the job of acquiring resources for the president simultaneously releases him from involvement in the work assigned to others and from the campus life that others create through their work together. Although administrators see the president's release as a necessity, the faculty interpret it as distancing, and some see it as exclusion:

> [The administrators] sit on the periphery ... They are distant. All deliberations occur physically and metaphysically at a distance from us. They don't try to encourage faculty involvement.

Faculty explain their resulting noninvolvement in several ways. Some see it as deriving from their own disinterest: "We don't need to know each others' salaries and efficiency ratings." Some say that they are too busy: "They [faculty] never read it [financial data] ... they don't have time." Some see themselves as unable to make sense of budgets: "I don't have the expertise to read it." Some look beyond themselves, explaining that at Continental this is simply how the system works: "The administrative style here is not to consult with faculty ... faculty have the sense that [the budget] is out of their control."

In sum, the faculty experience the college's delegation system as creating distance between themselves and administrators as the two disengage from each other's concerns.

The faculty experiencing "peace." Life at Continental College is conducive to the view of peace as the absence of conflict. There is little sense of change, "... only as a river changes flowing on," and therefore, the need to question, evaluate, challenge, and disagree over the appearance of something new or different is minimized.

In addition, the structuralism of the college, an extension and institutionalization of its delegation and division of labor philosophy, shields the faculty from the noise, bustle, and news generated by administrative activity. For example, the faculty have little contact with administrators other than those immediately above them on the official hierarchy. Even top administrators remain within their official niche, keeping the faculty distant physically and cognitively:

> I don't think that most of us who are not in administration really know ... who is in [the administration] or what they are doing.

The college's structural design minimizes the opportunity for differences in views to arise.

A number of the faculty are grateful not to be caught up in conflict and they are careful to prevent any upset. In the words

of one, "I don't want to be overly critical." Although a number of faculty admit, at least briefly, that they disapprove that top administrators "run the college" with minimal faculty involvement, many are also comfortable with things as they are. One interviewee explained, "They [faculty] may complain, and the next day they will be happy as a clam to be left alone."

Others, however, make the point that what is worrisome here is not administrative dominance or faculty noninvolvement as such, but the "mindless system" and passivity ("we just listened ...") that they spawn. They explain that as long as the faculty get the resources they want, "people don't complain." In the words of one campus participant, "We get lulled." Minimizing the need to engage in conflict may simultaneously minimize the need to engage in skepticism.

The faculty experiencing learning. In the absence of a larger engaging and interpretive picture, and in light of norms discouraging interdepartmental interaction, what do faculty count on for information, and what do they see through it?

Some faculty explain that their knowledge of the college's financial health is based on interpretations offered by colleagues who profess to understand what they themselves find vague. Many also say that they come to conclusions about what is happening in the larger scheme of things indirectly from the signs around them -- the budgetary surpluses, the salary raises, the buildings being repaired, cleaned, and painted, and also from the fact that, as best they can tell, "nothing looks like it is in trouble." In referring to the condition of the college many cite events related to the departments in which they spend their time and to which, therefore, their attention is riveted. In sum, the faculty's understanding of their reality is particularistic and varied.

How does the faculty's view compare to that of trustees and administrators? While the faculty depict a collage of micro realities, the trustees refer mostly to larger and uniform "rough categories," missing the multifarious details of the organizational life "down below." Through their data handbook, administrators have rich access to both a global and particularistic understanding of the "statistical" side of organizational functioning. Their major limitation is not being able to see beyond the handbook -- both to the subjective rendering of the objective knowledge that it contains, and to objective constructs exceeding the frame imposed by the handbook. While giving direction and consistency to their thinking, the handbook serves to solidify (and restrict) the span of their attention.

The realities that the people of Continental College "know" are bounded (Dearborn and Simon 1958, Simon 1961) in diverse ways. Faculty members' understandings are bounded largely by their immediate (and diverse) surroundings, especially by the departmental settings in which they spend most of their time. Administrators' understandings are largely bounded by the data

handbook that acts simultaneously as a conceptual frame and a conceptual blinder. Trustees' understandings are bounded by their reliance on administrative interpretation. Thus what faculty, administrators, and trustees see, and what they believe to be the "singular reality" of Continental College, differs. From a subjective perspective, Continental College is not one place, but many.

Evaluating: Reflections on Experience

Continental College has been extremely successful in meeting its financial goals, and its administrative and academic processes run like clockwork. From the standpoint of objective measures this is a financially solid college, and following the conventional wisdom, we might expect to find a relatively satisfied community, perhaps concerned about maintaining their current level of security. This is, in fact, the view of the president and trustees who assert that the kind of organization and leadership that the college needs now is "exactly what we've got" and that the current "game plan is exactly as it was before ... to keep the place humming along."

Most faculty agree with administrators that "we need to continue to have fiscal strength," and they praise the administration's strategy of "letting you feel comfortable ... confident ... financially." They describe the president as doing a good job of "institutional buffering within the limits of what it is possible for the college to achieve."

But below this surface of expressed comfort and gratitude, there are signs of searches for something different. Some faculty say that with its financial security, the college can now afford to be "a little more risky" and "aggressive," and that it may be time to "wake the sleeping giant" and to become a "social actor" rather than being just "a good neighbor." In describing what they need now, some call for leadership that "can articulate what Continental College is about" to its faculty and to a larger external audience, and for leadership that is "more visible, charismatic, dynamic." In focusing on what the faculty need, some briefly paint a picture of a very different institution:

> We need ... a greater sense of collegiality. There is the sense that [the administration] is a big box from which decisions emanate ... We have to have people talk to each other and trust that good will come -- that things will be more unruly.

Although many faculty say they are comfortable and secure, a number are simultaneously imagining the possibility of a different reality.

Observations

Several qualities stand out about Continental College. First, it is a bundle of self-contained contradiction. To some it is rational, linear, absolute in its form, and uninterrupted by emotive distraction. To others, it is highly political, malleable, and emotional. In the minds of some, it is very organized, efficient, and task-centered. In the minds of others, the very division of work into tasks that are carried out separately rather than jointly is distancing and depersonalizing. To some it is peaceful, permitting people to do productive work with little unnecessary interruption. To others, the sense of peace reflects a "noiselessness" which, while assuring tranquility, results in a "lulling" and even a "mindlessness" that stands counter to ideals of skeptical inquiry and creative productivity.

Second, the persons who are attuned to these contradictions are not the formal administrative leaders. Rather, they are the faculty who have learned to play on the plane of administrative rationality, and who have also mastered the politics and ambiguity that reign below this surface. In this institution, unlike many others that we have examined in the Institutional Leadership Project, the faculty appear more complex, behaviorally and cognitively, than their formal leaders.

Third, if we view "leadership" as the process of <u>defining</u> a reality that others, as followers, come to <u>adopt</u> (Smircich and Morgan 1982), then this college may be viewed as a campus where "leadership" happened in the past when the defining originally occurred. The task today is to maintain and to continue to live within the bounds of definitions established long ago. Moreover, these tasks of <u>defining</u> and <u>adopting</u> imply two very different forms of learning: The task of <u>defining</u> evokes an image of "interpretive" (or re-interpretive) learning, whereby persons question and rethink the base of what they know, occasionally transforming it; the task of <u>adopting</u> is more consistent with learning that is "acquisitive," whereby people add incrementally to a knowledge base that remains conceptually unchanged (see Neumann, in press). At Continental College, learning occurs by acquisition alone, with few attempts at interpretation or re-interpretation.

Fourth, Continental College displays diverse forms of "followership." There are the followers who adopt the definitions that others give to them, actively using them in fulfilling concrete tasks. There are also followers who adopt definitions for more passive purposes -- to monitor and control, interceding only for corrective purposes in a cybernetic (see Birnbaum 1988) fashion. There are followers who "are informed," acting more as targets of dissemination but not using the data in any kind of meaningful way. And finally, there are followers who were definers in the past, and who, in the present, follow only in the lines of their former thinking.

Fifth, the delegation system that administrators count on heavily as the basis of their organizing strategy serves, on the one hand, to relieve administrators from the interruptions of internal affairs. At the same time, however, it serves to distance them from internal campus life. This "delegation as distancing" phenomenon manifests itself behaviorally and cognitively. As administrators and faculty build different realities for themselves through work that they do apart from each other, their thinking also separates.

Sixth, while the underlying principle of "peace" serves to minimize destructive conflict, it also serves to mute criticism and critical thought by discouraging opposing views from being aired.

Seventh, while this campus displays an elaborate information system, the communication that occurs between the administrators and the faculty, who are bureaucratically separated from each other, is highly limited. While administrators communicate freely within their own administrative sub-circles and with the board, their communication with faculty flows in only one direction. The means that administrators use to communicate with the faculty resembles a dissemination model whereby information is sent out with the expectation that little will be given back to be built upon. Moreover, the communication that occurs between administrators and faculty is significantly less engaging, cognitively and emotionally, than the communication that occurs within the administrative sub-circles and between the president and the trustees. Where there is engagement, cohesion seems to follow. This presidential leader appears to build a stronger following among his external public, who define him as inspirational, than among his faculty, who view him as more instrumentally-directed.

Eighth, while administrators and trustees see their college as complete and at its peak, a number of faculty evoke images of incompleteness and unfulfilled possibility, and they point especially at the need to think beyond fundamental issues of security, even if this means opening the door to conflict and ambiguity, or in the words of one -- to a life that is more "unruly" than their current controlled design. What is striking about the faculty view is its double perspective on financial security as assuring, on the one hand, and confining, on the other. Administrators focus only on the assuring and protective aspects.

Ninth, while administrators present campus life as financially, administratively, and academically balanced and serene, the faculty present an image of internal stress as they straddle the demands of administrative rationality and the more human and political elements of their everyday lives, and as they express a sense of incompleteness in how they see their institution.

Tenth, administrators' and trustees' learning is more active, concrete, direct, meaningful, and personal than that of faculty. As a result they are more engaged in their learning

about the institution's resource context than are the faculty who are relatively disengaged from their context.

This study raises an important conceptual concern for scholars of higher education organizations. While the general organizational literature portrays managers and leaders as concerned, primarily, with acquiring, controlling, and coordinating resources, and with buffering the organization's productive or technical core (in this case, the faculty) from environmental intrusions (see Kast and Rosenzweig 1985, Katz and Kahn 1978, Pfeffer and Salancik 1978, Scott 1981), probes of the underside of life at Continental College question the degree to which these views can be applied wholesale to higher education settings: What is the price, to education, of having a leadership that is oriented, almost exclusively, to the job of resource-hunting and resource-caretaking? What is the educational price of "buffering" conducted in the name of "peace"? Although this study can not address these questions directly (because it did not set out to do so), they merit close attention in future research. Three specific concerns follow.

First, the case of Continental College indicates that financial stability is not necessarily associated with faculty vitality. Rather, the study shows that a leadership and organizational approach that leads to solid finances -- with little concern for how the faculty experience <u>what it takes to get there</u> -- can result in disengagement and stress for the faculty.

Second, the case also points out that organizational images of control and stability may shield stressful and disordered internal realities. In doing so, it questions the concept of "stress" as we commonly think of it. It is possible that there may be as much stress associated with conditions of "balance" or "equilibrium" (i.e., a financially and operationally stable institution) as with unstable conditions (i.e., an institution experiencing resource loss, leadership change, etc.). In the disturbed state, stress is, at least, acknowledged and, therefore, may be addressed. In the balanced state stress exists, but little attention is paid to its presence or the damage it may be wreaking. If this conception of stress is accurate, then perhaps we should be as concerned about institutions that are stable as those that are experiencing financial difficulty.

Third, as scholars of higher education, we separate, all too frequently, concerns about learning from concerns about leadership, thinking that the job-related "learning" that leaders and faculty do (for example, about their resource condition) is something quite different from the "real learning" that students do. This study raises the question of whether we can and should continue to make this distinction: Helping students become critically engaged within their personal, social, and professional contexts has been defined as a primary aim of

undergraduate education (Gamson and Associates 1984). It is hard to imagine how faculty who are not critically engaged within their own everyday, professional contexts can deliver on this aim. As administrators and as scholars, we have often wondered how much conflict and upheaval education can tolerate and still remain as "good education." This study raises a parallel question: How much stability can it take?

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